

Copyright
by
Anna Sophia Silverstein
2013

**The Report Committee for Anna Sophia Silverstein
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following report:**

SKUNK

**APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Supervisor:

Stuart Kelban

Andrew Garrison

Charles Ramírez Berg

Paul Stekler

SKUNK

By

Anna Sophia Silverstein, B.A.

Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

December 2013

Dedication

To good teachers.

Acknowledgements

To my thesis advisor Stuart Kelban, for opening the door to writing, and providing insight, guidance, humor, and unwavering support throughout the program and the making of this film.

To Andrew Shea, for his endless commitment to his students, and help at every stage of production; providing script notes, casting advice, production counsel, and feedback on numerous rough cuts.

To my thesis committee, Andrew Garrison, Charles Ramírez Berg, and Paul Stekler, for their insight, on-going encouragement, and perspective during the snags.

To Monique Walton, Nathan Duncan, and Josh Melrod. Without whom I would never have made it past the gate.

To our fearless cast and crew, for their creativity, and dedication.

To Gretchen Ludwig, for always saying, “go farther.”

To Evan Roberts, for his friendship and support from the moment we arrived.

To my MFA student colleagues, for the education I gained through our collaborations.

To Susanne Kraft, Jeremy Gruy, Linda Cavage, Lauren Stamps, and Keefe Borner, for their technical assistance, and wealth of knowledge.

To Gloria Holder, Bert Herigstad, and Char Burke, for their administrative support.

And a special thanks to my parents, Marsha and Murray Silverstein, brother and sister-in-law, Jacob and Mary Silverstein, and nephews, Leo and Josiah Silverstein, for their encouragement, love, and belief in wild explorations.

Abstract

SKUNK

Anna Sophia Silverstein, MFA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

Supervisor: Stuart Kelban

This report summarizes the process of developing, writing, directing, and editing SKUNK, a short narrative film. The film was produced as my graduate thesis film in the Department of Radio-Television-Film at the University of Texas at Austin in partial fulfillment of a Master of Fine Arts in Film Production. This report contextualizes the making of SKUNK, within my background as a youth worker, interest in community-based narratives, and development as an artist and filmmaker.

Table of Contents

Back Story.....	1
Development.....	3
Pre-Production	11
Creating a Team.....	11
Casting	13
Movie Dogs.....	18
Locations.....	20
The Look.....	23
Rehearsals	24
Production.....	27
Shoot Postponed.....	27
Day 1-3: The River Scene.....	28
Day 4-6: Leila's House.....	31
Re-Casting: A "Crisitunity"	35
Day 7: Returning to the River.....	36
Day 8-9: The Dogfight.....	36
Post-Production.....	40
The Editing Process	40
Re-Shoot	42
Final Thoughts	45
Appendix 1: Original Shooting Script	46
Appendix 2: Story Board DSLR.....	62

BACK STORY

I came into filmmaking through the back door. While many filmmakers dreamed of making movies since the time they were kids, I was an adult before I even thought about it. My focus was on teaching and social work. Serendipitously I found myself using filmmaking as a way to relate to my teenage students in an alternative education program. Many of them had been kicked out of school and were dealing with drug and alcohol addiction. We made videos together as a way for them to express themselves and explore issues in their lives. It was through this process that I discovered my own love of the craft.

I've always been attracted to telling what I think of as "outer circle stories." I'm interested in people and places that aren't often reflected in mainstream media and I'm drawn to the more subtle dramas in life. For instance, in my first fiction film *Spark*, rather than focusing on the romantic affair between two adults during their rendezvous, I chose to focus on the interaction between their respective children who were left outside the house to wait. This was the part of the story that most interested me, having spent so much time working with kids who were often left to fend for themselves. I became attuned to the dramas that played out in their daily lives: a feeling of isolation followed by a fleeting connection that means everything, a haircut that leads to a personal "transformation"... These are the stories that compelled me to make films: Themes about being an outsider, intersections around race and class, coming of age, humor in hurt and hope amidst struggle.

I was also drawn to hybrids, fictional films that are heavily influenced by documentaries, using non-actors playing themselves. I first started experimenting with this while working with youth on Native American reservations using film as a medium to tell stories about their lives. While the majority of our projects were documentaries, we also collaborated on short fiction films in which they would fictionalize scenes from their private lives that were often too personal and culturally taboo to discuss openly. Fictionalizing these stories made it possible for us to tell them. I found this process compelling. Up until then I had felt that truth is generally more powerful than fiction. But it suddenly occurred to me that sometimes fiction is a better way of telling the truth.

Since then I have been interested in using my background in documentary filmmaking to work collaboratively within communities to shape fiction films. Films I like that have used a similar process are *Ballast*, *Raising Victor Vargas*, and *Chop Shop*. There is a loose structure, a place, and protagonist, and then the writer/director works with the actors (and often non-actors), to develop the detailed storyline and dialogue that is truthful to their experience. However, this approach requires a lot of time, and did not seem feasible while in graduate school. I decided to write a script, and then do outreach to find people and places that related to it, could help shape the world, and give it a sense of authenticity. I wanted to make a film that would adhere to a 3-Act structure with a central conflict while maintaining deeply naturalistic roots. While I understood the process that interested me, it took me a while to land on the actual story.

DEVELOPMENT

I did not set out to write *SKUNK*. I had been working on a script called *Old Girl* that I developed in Stuart Kelban's first year MFA screenwriting class, and intended to shoot for my thesis film. The film tells the story of an old man, Miles, who lives in a rural Texas town with his pack of beloved dogs. When Miles' dog is attacked and killed by a local dog fighter's pit bull, he finds himself at a crossroad between seeking revenge and protecting the young boy that lives next door. I intended the story to be understated, naturalistic and subtle, and wanted to focus on the connection between Miles and the boy, both outsiders in their separate worlds.

After work shopping *Old Girl* in Stuart's class, it seemed like a good fit for my second fiction piece (having made a documentary for my pre-thesis film). While it was similar in tone and style to my first year film *Spark*, *Old Girl* had much stronger dramatic elements that would further challenge me as a director and I knew this was important—to push myself, experiment, and learn as much as I could in the process. I had other ideas for scripts, but I didn't want to stall out or get tied up with commitment issues, bouncing around between ideas and spending an additional two years in the program. *Old Girl* seemed like the next logical step.

The problem was, I wasn't excited about making it. As much as I worked on the script and was encouraged by classmates, I couldn't identify with any of the characters. I felt disconnected from the material and it was hard to visualize. I tried to tell myself “don't get too precious about any story at this point, just tell a story and you'll get

better.” But knowing how much work it would take, how much sacrifice, and lack of sleep, I felt uneasy continuing to move forward given that I was so ambivalent.

Moreover, when you’re making student films and asking people to work tirelessly on them for free, you damn well better feel passionate about the project yourself, or at least be able to project some amount of excitement so that your crew will feel excited too.

Otherwise, why bother.

My good friend Gretchen read the script and pointed out that the entire cast was male, the only female in it was the dead dog. I’d already been conscious of how little I write about women. Except *Night at the Dance*, my first year documentary, and a short exercise I did for Andrew Shea’s Dogme class, every fiction and documentary film I’ve made prior to and during graduate school has had male protagonists. I’m not sure why this is, though it’s probably some combination of the following:

1. I’m used to stories being about men. Most of them are.
2. When I was a youth worker my students were mainly boys and I spent a lot of time thinking about the male psyche and how it develops.
3. Fear of writing bad female characters.

I was lost and knew I needed to start over. So I decided to task myself with creating a female protagonist. But “commitment issues” kept ringing in my ear, so rather than starting from scratch, I decided to stay within the world I had already created in *Old Girl*.

My first attempt at revising the script, and telling it from a female character’s point of view, in retrospect, was kind of ridiculous. I essentially just substituted a teenage girl named Paige, for the old man Miles, and made some minor tweaks. It reminds me of

the joke about Hollywood Producers that make screenwriters want to slit their wrists,
“We really like what you got here...it’s a great script, but if you could just make the main
character a Jewish hockey player instead, we think that would really add to the story.”

Turning Miles into Paige was a surface level substitution. I was simply doing a
gender/age swap and I couldn’t relate to Paige either, because Paige was still an old man,
just posing as a teen girl. It was a mistake, but it took me another month to realize it.
Finally, I trashed *Old Girl* for good.

I started fresh. All I gave myself to work with was a teenage girl, and the dog she
loves, and let the story unfold from there. I was free to develop an entirely new cast of
characters—which ended up being all teens, and as I started to write about something I
could relate to, I became more invested. Before coming to graduate school I was a youth
media educator and social worker for ten years in rural Washington. My students were
Native American, grew up poor, lived on a secluded reservation, and many perceived
themselves as outsiders. Traces of this environment became part of the story I was
writing-- a situation without the presence of adults, on the outskirts of town where the
teens are careening between good and bad decisions as they try to figure out their
identities, relationships, and self-worth.

I imagined Leila, the protagonist, to be a subdued 14-year old full of

contradictions--passive, active, vulnerable, tough, naïve, brassy, and shy. She's not able to fully get a handle on what is happening at any given moment, and her self-consciousness, ambivalence, and desire for connection ultimately get her into an unsafe situation where she is forced to take action. I wanted to explore what gets girls into these situations where they are in over their heads, and what, in turn, becomes the moment they decide to take control. Like many of the youth I used to teach, Leila struggles with some of the same adolescent issues--trying to negotiate relationships in terms of power, performance, and social status, often through the crucible of sex.

The character of Marco was easier for me to write than Leila. He's a compilation of so many young men I've known; a teenage boy desperately seeking the approval of his peers who is unsure of his body, his manhood, and is constantly struggling to compensate. Marco's curiosity, attraction, and affection for Leila is in conflict with his desire to prove his masculinity to his friends and join their ranks. While at the end of *SKUNK* Marco makes a series of bad decisions that leave an audience with little empathy for his character, I wanted to show where he started—an outsider himself who is mixed-up, struggles with shame, and is in need of attention.

It was essential to me to avoid making caricatures of these kids, but rather create believable and nuanced portrayals that felt true to life. Since Marco is the antagonist in this story, it felt especially important to focus on achieving a complexity in his character, showing his vulnerability and charm in addition to his anger and abuse, instead of

depicting him merely as a clichéd teenage thug.

The story, in short, is as follows: Leila wakes up to find that her pit bull, Bubba, has killed a skunk. Her mother yells at her to wash the dog before she gets home from work. Leila takes her dog to a swimming spot off the highway, where local kids go to party. While Leila washes Bubba, she notices Marco getting picked on by his older cousin and his group of friends. They've brought their pit bulls to the swimming spot too. They tease Marco and throw him in the river. Marco sees Leila watching him and approaches her. He is initially interested in Bubba, but is soon intrigued by Leila. He feels "legit" in her company. Leila can relate to Marco, and enjoys his attention and charm. He invites himself over to her house that afternoon and Leila accepts. A make out session ensues, and in the process Marco fantasizes to Leila about having her as his girlfriend and fighting her dog. He says his older cousin Daryl is an amateur dog fighter. She laughs and calls him a poser. Marco's ego is bruised, but Leila apologizes and they start making out again. Marco tries to lift up her skirt, but she doesn't let him, moving his hand to her chest instead. They continue to kiss and it starts to get heated. Marco ends up prematurely ejaculating in his shorts. Leila, having never made out with anyone, doesn't fully grasp what has happened, but goes to get him a towel, scared but also excited by the sexual experience. When she gets back she's disappointed to see that Marco is gone. Then she realizes Bubba is gone as well. Leila goes after them. She bikes through the

neighborhood looking for her dog. She hears barks coming down the street on her way to Daryl's house. Marco is there with Bubba, trying to get him to attack Daryl's pit bull, which is tied to a tree. Everyone is laughing at Marco, and Bubba, who is clearly afraid and not a fighter. Leila yells at Marco to give him back her dog and a struggle begins. Marco, further embarrassed in front of the crowd refuses to return the dog. The argument escalates until Daryl tells Marco to give the dog back. Marco tries to regain control by humiliating Leila. He tells her he'll give the dog back if she lifts up her skirt. The crowd snickers, some shake their head, but no one intervenes, not even the older girls watching. Leila looks at her dog, and lifts her skirt up. Marco laughs, and says to his friends, "I told y'all her pussy smells like skunk." The crowd groans--Marco has gone too far. Marco hands Leila the leash. She stands there with her skirt up and the leash in her hand. She doesn't leave. She looks at Marco, then walks slowly towards him, pressing her body against his, as if she's going to whisper something in his ear. Instead, she pees on him. Marco jumps back stunned. The crowd erupts in laughter and disbelief, pointing at him, going crazy. Leila pulls her skirt down and walks off with Bubba. As the laughter of the crowd and barks subside the further Leila gets from the house, she breaks into a smile. The end.

We are encouraged to take risks in our filmmaking at RTF, and the risk factors in *SKUNK*, felt much higher than anything I've attempted before. They included:

- Working with kid and dogs.
- Creating an authentic depiction of the world I wrote about.
- Teen make out scene and premature ejaculation.
- The dog fight.
- And finally, the girl urinates on him?! WTF!!

I wrote the script without worrying about how difficult it would be to make, but I did go back and forth about the peeing in the last scene. I'd never written something that got such a split review. It was literally 50/50 among friends/filmmakers/professors who read the script and gave feedback. And both sides felt very strongly about whether it should stay or go. I tried to think of an alternate ending, something that everyone would agree on, something less risky, but nothing I came up with made sense to me. The alternates were either anti-climactic or Leila felt too passive. I wanted her to have the last word. I wanted her to do something bold. She had already lifted her skirt, what did she have to lose? A couple from the no-pee contingent said, "but you will humiliate her even more." I didn't think so. By the time she lifts her skirt, in my mind, Leila has gained her strength. She will do what it takes to protect her dog, she will play along with Marco's game, and then she will subvert it. I believed the one who would truly be humiliated would be Marco. This is how I imagined it, but I would be lying if I said, that even now, I'm confident that it works.

But here I tasked myself again: "Try it. Try something that people disagree on. Don't be safe. See if you can make it work." I gave myself permission to try and fail, and I wrote the following words down on a piece of paper and taped them above my desk:

A soulful mess.

I decided I would be satisfied if I ended up with a soulful mess. There was so much in the piece that felt uncertain and challenging, so many potential risks, but I wanted to try it. And if in the end it didn't quite work, but it still had soul, I would be satisfied. So I committed to the script and headed into pre-production.

My faculty advisor Stuart Kelban helped me immensely during the screenwriting stage, reading drafts, meeting up to discuss revisions, and figuring out places to raise the stakes and trim the fat. Stuart's first year screenwriting class had an immense impact on me, and it was joy to work closely with him on this project. Professor Andrew Shea, while not formally on my thesis committee, was also incredibly helpful in discussing the script, and thinking ahead to production challenges. I'm grateful to both professors for offering me unwavering support from the beginning stages of *SKUNK* through to the final edit.

PRE-PRODUCTION

Creating a team

My frequent collaborator and good friend Evan Roberts was interested in co-producing *SKUNK* and suggested we bring Kelsey Coggin, to our team, who had produced his graduate films. The three of us met in December to discuss our timeline and approach. Evan, who I've always admired for his creativity and ability to pitch ideas and get people on board, was interested in helping with casting and crowd funding. Kelsey had experience producing student shorts and was very helpful in making the initial budget, and thinking about logistics.

I had discussed the project with a couple different cinematographers, and decided to work with my classmate Nathan Duncan, who had shot my earlier short film *Spark*. Nathan and I have collaborated throughout our time at UT and have a similar aesthetic, tone, and interest in naturalism and visual storytelling. It was a great opportunity to continue our work together, further developing our "language," and style. Nathan was more than a DP to this project, consulting early on about the script and making time to work on the edit. At every stage he was a true collaborator.

Midway through pre-production Evan and Kelsey got too busy with other work and commitments, to continue to dedicate time to the project, and Monique Walton, a recent RTF-MFA graduate came on as a head producer and assistant director. I knew Monique through the program, but never had the opportunity to work with her. Our

working relationship is one of the most meaningful things I gained from the entire experience. Monique's investment in the project, creative insight, dependability, strength, wisdom, and shared vision were transformative. There were many hurdles in the course of making this film, so many unforeseen challenges, and Monique handled them all with thoughtfulness and grace. I truly felt like I found a partner, and I'm certain I could not have made the film without her.

A month prior to our shoot Sarah Kolb, an undergraduate finishing up her film degree, joined our team as a co-producer. I was familiar with Sarah's work producing Britta Lundin's graduate thesis film, *Lost Pines*, and I jumped at the opportunity to work with her. Sarah's artistic sensibility, organization, and endless positive energy were an incredible gift to us during pre-production, and helped pave the way for the shoot. Given how much unpaid work goes into producing student films, our co-producer tag-team approach ended up being essential. People contributed what they could when they were able, and passed the torch when they were unavailable. It worked out well, but it was essential to have Monique, as the head producer, from beginning to end so things didn't get too fragmented.

Bich Vu had contacted me early on about doing production design for my thesis film. Bich was earning her MFA in studio art and had done production design for Brian Schwarz's award-winning thesis film *Ol' Daddy*. I was impressed by her prior work, and liked her interpretation of the script and how she translated this into her design ideas. Kelsey recruited her friend Cara Stewart to join our production design team. Cara has great instincts around creating environments in which characters can interact with the

design in a natural way. So Bich and Cara worked together, and collaborated to create the visual context for our characters.

Claire White, whose work I knew from *Lost Pines*, came on as our costume designer. Carmen Hilbert and John Knudson, both recent graduates of the undergraduate program, signed on as gaffers. Bradley Murphy, another recent graduate, came on as the sound recordist. From there the heads of each department recruited the additional crew that was needed, and we met regularly to prepare for the shoot.

Casting

I was clear from the beginning that I wanted to take a non-traditional approach to casting; visiting high schools, youth groups, teen hang outs, looking for young people who could identify with these characters and bring themselves into the story in an authentic way. Since my time working with youth on the reservation, I've been interested in collaborating with non-actors to shape naturalistic stories that aren't often seen in mainstream filmmaking. This approach can create incredibly truthful and unique performances that are nuanced, and insightful, when successful. When unsuccessful, they come off as clunky, self-conscious, and amateur. I understood that this should also be added to the risk list—working with non-actors. But the process fascinates me, and particularly when working with youth, and given my background in documentary and social work, allows me to combine several of my interests. I didn't rule out working with youth who had acting experience. I auditioned everyone who was interested in the part. But in addition to holding typical casting sessions, we made a huge recruitment effort,

trying to connect with youth who might be interested in the opportunity, but didn't identify as actors.

The challenge of this approach is time. It takes an incredible amount of time and effort to go looking for your talent in everyday life. Other films I've read about, that have taken a similar approach (*Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *Chop Shop*, *Sugar*, *Fish Tank*) spend up to six months with a team of interns looking at thousands of people, visiting classrooms, work places, churches, basketball games, and community events, until they find *the one*. We had 4-5 weeks, no interns, and limited mobility. Furthermore, the majority of the schools I contacted about recruiting students or holding auditions flat out denied us access. This was especially discouraging in the case of McCallum High, a diverse performing arts school that I thought would surely get on board with extending the opportunity to their students. I realized though, that it is always safer for principles to say no. Personal connections were needed and I didn't have time to form them. This was frustrating to me--I had spent much time forming such working relationships in Seattle while doing non-profit community work. But in Austin, I'd been so involved with the graduate program since my arrival, that I felt utterly disconnected from surrounding communities. And this was a barrier once I went outside of the insular filmmaking community to try and make a film.

After many "no's" a couple schools did let us come on campus to present the project and do outreach with their students: Del Valle High School and Odyssey (a local charter school). Sarah Kolb and I spent afternoons at skate parks and nights at roller skating rinks looking for kids. It's ironic, because in being denied access to youth through

institutions, we were forced into other avenues that felt way sketchier, such as walking up to kids at the mall, “Hey kid, ya wanna be in a movie?” I always carried a clipboard and business cards to look official, and it also helped that Sarah and I were females, but I still felt creepy about approaching unattended minors and asking them to audition. I made an informational flyer about the project and told them to discuss it with their parents, and then get in touch if they were interested. But even if they were interested, they were, after all teenagers, and I suspected most would lose the piece of paper somewhere, or forget to follow up. Which is to say again, the process of recruiting non-actor youth was painstaking and stressful.

Another big issue we faced in casting was the mature content in the script. Before we began, Andrew Shea suggested I cast 18-year-olds that look young, but once we began our search this seemed unlikely. I’m not sure if it’s the food youth are eating these days, but 18-year-olds look 23, and 15-year-olds look 18. And I’m not even referring to clothing or style--their physical bodies look older than they actually are. I couldn’t believe how old the young females looked who were auditioning for the role of Leila. It was important to me to depict Leila as someone with one foot in childhood and the other in adulthood--that limbo stage where so many girls have their first sexual encounter. Although many TV shows and films have people in their 20s playing teenagers, I was trying to create a naturalistic piece and it didn’t look right to me when young adults were auditioning for the parts of the teenagers. I had a hunch that the youth I would want to cast would be minors, in which case they, as well as their parents, would need to be

comfortable with the content in the script. It would be my responsibility to ensure that they felt safe throughout the experience.

Beyond “on-street” recruitment, we held regular casting sessions at UT, advertising on Craigslist, on-line bulletin boards, and through word of mouth. This is, in fact, how we found our lead, Jenny. I had sent an email to every person I knew locally who worked with youth, or knew people that worked with youth, and asked them to invite their students to our next casting session. Bridget Farr, a local actress who has been in several student films made by friends, was teaching Introduction to Acting at a junior high school and had a student she thought might be good for the part. I immediately liked Jenny when I met her. She was awkward and shy, but spoke with intention. There was something beneath the surface, something mysterious about her. She was only 14 years old, but was self-reflective and strong. She possessed so many of the contradictions I was interested in exploring through the character of Leila. She had the edge of a kid who has already experienced hardship in life. Jenny was self-conscious too, and I wasn’t sure that she would be able to give the range of emotions needed for Leila, but I knew I wanted to invite her to callbacks.

Looking for a boy to play Marco concerned me. Similar to Leila, this is a character full of contradictions. He needs to be vulnerable, but “front” like he’s powerful. He needs to be self-conscious, but still have swagger. I had a feeling that the kid who could pull this off would not see himself as an actor, and would never show up to an audition. So how could we find him? I spoke with everyone I could think of in trying to cast this role. Beth Chatelain, a former RTF graduate student, told me to check out a

young rapper from Houston named Kiowa. Filmmaker Micah Magee shot a feature last summer called *Petting Zoo*, and had scouted Kiowa at a rap concert in Houston. She cast him for a small role in her film. I didn't know Micah personally, but both Beth and Monique had worked briefly on the project during pre-production. I was able to find videos of Kiowa rapping on YouTube. They were outdated, but gave me a sense of his demeanor, and I immediately liked him for the role of Marco. We found him on Facebook and invited him to Austin for an audition. He hadn't acted since *Petting Zoo*, but he was interested in gaining more experience, as long as we understood that rapping was his passion. I knew before he got off the bus from Houston that I wanted to cast him in the film.

After a month of hitting the streets we held a two-day casting session with local casting agent Vicky Boone. We'd set it up as a safety net, in case we hadn't found anyone through our alternative casting approach. During this session we cast Heather Kafka as Leila's mom. I had seen Heather in various films, and am a fan of her work. Even though the part of Leila's mom is small I jumped at the opportunity to work with her and was happy that she was interested. We held call backs for the youth. There was another contender for the role of Leila, but ultimately she felt too old to me. Kiowa and Jenny read through the river scene together. Jenny, intimidated by the formality of it all, was nervous. But I noticed that they had chemistry. I decided to have one last call back in a more casual environment, because I thought if Jenny felt comfortable, she would perform better. This helped quite a bit. Even though Jenny was inexperienced, and her

performances could be sporadic, she was courageous, raw, and determined. I believed she could do it, and we gave her the role.

There were still many unknowns, but I felt right about casting two kids who could relate to the world the film is set in. They've both experienced poverty, and could draw on their own life experience to inform their characters. They're also both exceptionally bright, naturally artistic, and deep thinkers. The youth worker part of me felt, that not only would they bring something special to the film, but being on-set around a bunch of adult artists could be a good experience for them as well. This kind of exchange, where the relationships formed during the creative process go far beyond what is captured on screen, is the kind of work I was doing on the reservation, and the kind of work I continue to find inspiring.

We cast the roles of Daryl and his entourage, through our sessions we held at UT. Some had come to audition for the role of Leila or Marco, but were too old. Others responded to a post we had done specifically for tough boys in their young 20's.

Movie Dogs

Kelsey suggested I contact Bobbi Colorado, an animal trainer in town who has worked on big budget films, to get her advice on how to find dogs. I couldn't afford Bobbi (she quoted me \$25,000!), but I could get her advice. Bobbi warned me over the phone, "Dogs are the only ones on set who don't care you are trying to make a movie." She then suggested I write a new script without dogs. I believe she was trying to give it to me straight, and be kind, but I was completely discouraged. Next I contacted Top Dog

Talent Agency in Louisiana, recommended to me by filmmaker Kyle Henry. Kyle had been in touch with them while casting for his film, *Fourplay*. My contact at Top Dog read the script and said he could give me a student discount that would cost me around \$4,000. This was two times more than I had budgeted, but it seemed at least plausible to try and fundraise. However, this trainer was difficult to connect with, and when I finally got him on the phone again he quote me \$10,000 for three days, couldn't remember the script, and said he wasn't able to mix pit bulls on set with other breeds. The dogs are essentially in every scene and we would need them for at least 6 days. I called Stuart and was ready to throw in the towel. I was shocked I hadn't considered that working with dogs alone could rule out making this movie. How could I have worked so long on the script and been blind to whether any of this would be feasible to make? That's when screenwriters would shrug and say to directors/producers, "that's your job to figure out." I had made my bed.

A friend of mine who owns a pit bull said she follows a woman named Tara on Facebook, who specializes in "misunderstood dogs." I looked on Tara's website which features a pack of dogs she has rescued, rehabilitated, and trained, including a couple of pit bulls. There was a video that showed about 10 different breeds--standing together in line waiting to eat their dinner until she gave the command. The dogs looked like well-trained strays, scrappy and imperfect. The other dog trainers I'd found in Austin owned immaculately groomed pure breeds, and none of them had pit bulls. I watched the video and thought, jackpot!

Mind you, I had already given up on working with a *movie* dog trainer. I knew I couldn't afford it. I was trying to find a dog trainer who would be interested in working

on a movie. Tara is in high demand. She's considered a specialist and has clients every day of the week except Wednesdays, but she made time to meet with me and discuss the film. She had read the script and liked the idea that Leila would do anything for her dogs. She also saw it as an opportunity to show that pit bulls are misunderstood, and can be trained to be non-aggressive.

I explained to Tara how movie sets run-- the long days, the multiple takes, the time spent waiting in between set ups. I said that if she were interested, I could pay her a stipend for taking a week off work to be on set with her dogs. She agreed. She had already started casting dogs while reading the script. Her pit bull Axel would play Bubba, and a client's pit bull, Patrón, would play the aggressive pit bull, Hooch. The other dogs, she said, could be any ones we choose from her pack.

I was so relieved. Tara was confident her dogs were up for it, and would be able to take care of them on set, and bring volunteers to help wrangle. This eliminated a huge logistical issue. I met with Tara several times after that, going through the script and talking about what was needed from the dogs in each scene. She assured me they would be fine with everything. I brought Nathan Duncan, our DP, and Jenny (once she was cast) to these meetings so they had time to form relationships with the dogs. In addition to Axel and Patrón we chose Peanut, a Chihuahua, Maverick, a Border Collie, and Allie, a Border Collie mix.

Locations

We spent four weeks looking for three locations; a run down house where Leila

and her mom live, a river/swimming spot where Leila meets Marco, and a backyard for the attempted dogfight. I knew I didn't want to go any further than Bastrop, and preferred to shoot closer to Austin. The first location we locked was a house in Del Valle. We had zeroed in on Del Valle as an ideal area to shoot the film. Del Valle feels somewhat rural and yet is on the cusp of urban. I wanted to create the sense that the city skyline is visible to the teens way off in the distance, but that they are far from it, living on the margins.

I spent several days going door to door on different blocks in Del Valle, leaving letters, and meeting the residents when they were home. Finally I saw a little pink house on Hergotz Street that looked like it could be a good fit. I explained the project to Regina, the owner, and asked if I could look around. She welcomed me in. Regina lived there, along with her mother, daughter, and daughter's baby. The inside of the house, was exactly as I imagined when writing the script. It's what architects refer to as a "dog-trot house," there is a direct path from the front door to the back door, a simple design used in hot climates to increase cross ventilation. Regina's house doesn't have AC, so both doors are propped open all day and the screen doors keep the bugs out. The doors offer natural light and wonderful framing options. I liked the idea of having Leila's first kiss framed by the open back door. I loved the backyard, and the living room where the make out scene occurs had two windows so we could make it look naturally lit. We offered Regina \$100/day for the use of her home for 4 days and she accepted. It was clear that \$400 would really help her and her family out.

We looked at many river spots, but none of them seemed right. They were either too rural, too shallow, too far out, or too populated. Finally we discovered Bull Creek by

accident, while driving along 360. It was a lucky find. Bull Creek is gorgeous. From certain angles you can see the highway in the back, and from other angles it is stunning in its natural beauty, with tremendous rock formations and pools that are deep enough for diving. Bull Creek is part of the Green Belt, and one of the two spring-fed water supply creeks in Austin. The folks who frequent the swimming hole are predominantly working class. The socio-economic make-up is clearly different from that which you'll find at Barton Creek. Men in their young 20's go there to party and swim. And people bring their dogs and let them run around off-leash. If there are park rules, one gets the sense they are rarely enforced. It fit well into the visual world we were trying to represent in *SKUNK*.

The backyard for the dogfight came last. By this point we were getting desperate. Sarah Kolb and I drove out to Manor to see if we would have any luck. We were looking for a backyard that visually looked like it could be in the same area as Leila's house, and I was hoping for a layout that would allow Leila to round the corner of the house and see Hooch chained to a tree barking like mad. We drove up and down the block until we found a house that fit this description. We talked to the homeowner, a single mom named Michelle, and she seemed somewhat open to the idea. She would be at work during our shooting hours, and we wouldn't have access to her home, just the backyard. This meant we would have to rent a generator for electricity and use the bathrooms at the nearby gas station. We figured we could make do. "Just let me warn the neighbor before you come so he doesn't shoot you," Michelle said.

The Look

I was interested in creating a deeply naturalistic look, developing a visual style that centered around character and environment. I continue to be inspired by the visual poetics of Lynne Ramsay. In her short film *Gasman*, Ramsay often uses long takes to express an emotional turn for her child protagonist. Within one shot several different compositions are created that mirror the character's emotional state. The cinematography in her films is not merely coverage, but rather deliberate and visually stunning, injecting her films with perspective and depth. It's not that I was trying to adopt her style so much as use her work to help us define our visual poetics--how they served the story, and how they would carry emotional resonance. Films we drew on for stylistic inspiration were *Ballast*, *Raising Victor Vargas*, and Andrea Arnold's *WASP* and *Fish Tank*. These films are character-driven, naturalistic, and beautifully shot. The camera work feels immediate and intimate. This is what we were striving to create in the visual language of *SKUNK*.

I asked Nathan to do a preliminary shot list and I did the same. Then we came together and discussed our ideas. We planned to shoot the majority of the film handheld, to give it a naturalistic feel and make it easier to follow action between the kids and dogs as it unfolded. I wanted to take a subtle approach in shooting the sexual scenes between Leila and Marco, where the viewers are able to fill in the visual gaps rather than hitting them over the head with graphic coverage. I believed the less that was shown in these moments the more potent they would become. The river scene felt mapped out, as did the make out scene. The only scenes that were less planned were the scenes with dogs: we couldn't predict how the dogs would behave and where they would actually go in the

opening scene and dogfight. We had a general idea, but knew things would change.

One of the great things about working with Nathan is the time he dedicates to rehearsals. To me this is an essential part of the process. I know it's common for directors to develop a shot list with their DP, and then not meet up again until the shoot starts. But Nathan and I figure out so much of the visual language through rehearsals, and discover things that might not occur to us while under the time pressure of being on set. We had several rehearsals that Nathan shot on a DSLR and then I created still frames from the footage to use as our storyboard. We did this for *Spark* as well, and it was an incredibly useful tool.

I wanted the color palette to be somewhat muted, grainy, and earthy. I was interested in relying on natural light whenever possible, and not being afraid to let things fall into shadow. If money weren't an issue I would have preferred to shoot on 16mm to give the film a grittier, softer feel. But I couldn't afford it, and knew that in working with non-actors and dogs it was important to allow for many takes. We chose to shoot on the Alexa. I was worried that it's size and weight would be unwieldy for Nathan, since the majority of the film would be handheld, but he preferred it to the EX-1 and felt that he could handle the size so long as he had a strong camera department to help him.

Rehearsals

I had several rehearsals with Jenny, a couple with Jenny and Kiowa together, and one rehearsal with Jenny and Heather. In the rehearsals with Jenny, my focus was to make her as comfortable as possible, establish trust between the two of us, and figure out

how she responds to direction. Many of our rehearsals involved no acting, but rather consisted of us talking about our lives, relationships, and what it's like to be an adolescent girl. Forming this bond was essential. For a 14 year old to pull off the role of Leila is risky, and emotionally taxing. I knew Jenny needed to trust me. This wasn't hard-
-Jenny and I connected immediately and had mutual respect for each other. I was amazed by her sense of self. Jenny had to grow up fast in life, and rather than being resentful about this, she's self-reflective and wise beyond her years. We also bonded over fixation with sour patch candy and dislike of eggplant.

It was harder to spend time with Kiowa since he lived in Houston, but I felt at ease with him immediately. Kiowa is a riot. He is bursting with ideas and never stops talking. He's incredibly creative and like Jenny, has tremendous insight about a childhood that was far from easy. I felt that I could get the performance out of him needed with very little practice, but wanted to make sure he and Jenny had at least a couple rehearsals together so I could gauge their energy. I was trying to figure out how to approach the make out scene. I had discussed this scene with both Jenny and Kiowa, and their respective parents, before offering them the role. I wanted to make sure it was something that they were both comfortable with, and could handle emotionally. I was more concerned about Jenny, who had less experience. But she assured me that she would not have accepted the part if she didn't trust me, and didn't trust Kiowa. She thought we were both good people and believed we would create a safe environment for the scene. There was no way around the fact that it was going to start off as a very awkward experience for everyone involved. However, I knew that this awkwardness had the

potential to translate in a good way for the film.

While I wanted Jenny and Kiowa to become comfortable with each other, I didn't want them to spend too much time together before we started shooting, because I wanted their real life awkwardness around each other to be present in the film. We ran through the river scene at the actual river, rehearsed when Marco first comes over to Leila's house, but decided not to rehearse the make out scene. Instead we talked it through, and even blocked it a bit, but they did not kiss until the actual shoot.

PRODUCTION

While it was hardly the making of *Fitzcarraldo*, the ambitious nature of trying to work with non-actor kids and dogs, in 103-degree heat, quickly started to feel out of our league as a student production. We also had a series of unexpected mishaps and unforeseen challenges along the way. It's a true testament to the strength of our crew and cast that we got through it. Everyone worked their tails off, through some very uncomfortable days. I felt lucky to have such a committed team.

Shoot Postponed

We were set to shoot *SKUNK* for 8 days in May, but a week before production began we were told Kiowa could no longer participate until he was out of school for the summer. Re-casting the part within a week felt impossible, given how long it took us to find Kiowa. There was no one else we auditioned that seemed like a viable option. Monique, Nathan and I had an emergency meeting on my back porch to discuss our options. We did not want to lose the momentum we had been building, and were worried that Bull Creek would dry up by June if we postponed. So we decided to shoot the river scene in May, over a long weekend, and shoot the remainder of the film in June. This caused several problems, both financial and logistical. Beyond needing to reschedule with our actors, dogs, location, and crew, it put us in an awkward position with our dog trainer, who had already canceled clients for the week in May and took a financial hit. It

also meant we would be shooting in the summer heat. And while we didn't know it at the time, postponing the shoot meant we would have to recast our entire group of extras. Still, we felt like this was our best option and moved forward.

Day 1-3: The River Scene

The first three days at Bull Creek were grueling. From the moment we set up for our first shot I realized how severely I underestimated the difficulty of working with dogs. We thought we had scheduled a light day, giving the crew and cast extra time to familiarize themselves with the equipment, but nothing felt light about it. For starters, despite our meetings going through the script and discussing what to expect, it immediately became apparent that our dog trainer Tara and I had several miscommunications. I thought her dogs were okay to be off leash and walk with Jenny. On set I found out that Tara was worried that if her dogs saw other dogs they would run away. We were at a public park where people bring their dogs off-leash all the time. So this posed a huge problem. At all times we needed at least 3-4 members of our crew standing just out of frame holding bamboo sticks to keep the dogs in line. Furthermore, the dogs didn't want to stay with Jenny. They would run back to Tara as soon as we rolled camera. Instead of my first thought being, "Yay! It's finally happening," it was, "Oh my god, how the hell are we going to get through this entire film."

Make no mistake, I didn't think it would be easy to work with dogs. I knew it would be a challenge. But I also thought because the film was handheld and we were shooting it documentary-style, the dogs could, for the most part, do what they naturally

do and we could get what we needed. This was somewhat true, it just took five times longer than expected.

Also, we found out the day before the shoot, that in respect to Humane Society rules we would need to close the park down for the next two days if we were going to be able to pull off anything with the dogs at the river. We had a permit to shoot there, but beyond that had no authority to turn people away. We did so anyway, arming our PA's with walkie talkies, clip boards, and official looking paperwork. They were camped out in the parking lot so when people arrived they could tell them to leash their dog and stay away from where we were shooting. If any dogs got passed our PA's and came into contact with our actor dogs we would have to stop the shoot. It created a good deal of frantic energy, being under-crewed and trying to interface with the public and off-leash dogs all day long. Paul Stekler, Chairman of the Department, stopped by to observe our set and quickly became an impromptu "dog bouncer." Meanwhile the "actor" dogs were throwing us curveballs. In the script, Bubba runs into the water after Leila washes him. Despite what we were told, Axel, the dog playing Bubba, was afraid of the water and wouldn't get in. The amount of time I've already spent explaining the situation with the dogs without mentioning anything else about the first day is indicative of the situation we found ourselves in, and would for the rest of the shoot.

We were scheduled to shoot Daryl and his entire posse at the river the morning of

our second day. It was the first warm weekend in Austin and we knew we would have an even harder time keeping the public and their dogs away from our set, so we were racing the clock from the moment we arrived. Our trainer had made it clear that Patrón, the pit bull who plays Hooch, could not come into contact with ANY other dog or there would be trouble. We figured this meant he would eat them. We also had 10 extras to coordinate. Anxiety was running high. I realized this was the largest group of actors I had ever directed at once, and they were all across a giant creek from me. I crossed over, so I could rehearse with them face to face, then crossed back and used a bullhorn if I needed to make adjustments. We were rushed in figuring out the choreography and even though it didn't look quite right to me we had to shoot and move on.

The good news was Jenny and Kiowa did a great job our first three days. They were courageous, and for the most part focused, and their performances got consistently better as we went. I started to discover tricks I could use when directing them to enliven their performances and make things feel more natural if the dialogue was starting to get canned. These included:

1. Keep it physical. Have them do push-ups or jumping jacks so they stop thinking and get in touch with their impulses.
2. Ask each of them to tell a joke immediately before going into a take and performing their dialogue. The best takes were the ones where they were cracking up and would then shift into character.
3. Keep it casual. The more they sensed stress from the crew and I, the more stressed they became and it stopped being fun. The more energy we gave them, the more

energy they gave back.

Their performances were really the backbone of the scene so it was important to have it go well, and I felt they pulled it off.

There were additional problems we faced; the heat caught us off guard and made two crew members sick, there were water snakes blocking our route between one side of the creek and the other, and Nathan, after filming in wet clothes for 10 hours each day got such a bad case of “crotch rot” he had to go on steroids to treat it. We were all glad we had three weeks off to regain our strength and gear up for the rest of the shoot.

Day 4-6: Leila’s House

A couple days before we resumed shooting in June, Jenny got sick. Because she was contagious and we were about to shoot the make out scene between her and Kiowa, we felt we couldn’t move forward as planned. We pushed the shoot back once again, this time by only a couple days. But it had the same domino effect--we needed to rework our schedule, rearrange locations, and re-coordinate with actors and dogs. Monique deserves a gold star for doubling as Producer and Assistant Director through all the rearrangements during our shoot.

When we showed up to Regina’s the morning of the first shoot day in June, we hit another snag. We had paid Regina early for the use of her home because she had an

unexpected family emergency. But she hadn't told us a woman named Donna had moved into a shack in her backyard, with her teenage son, boyfriend, and pit bull. They had no electricity and ran an extension cord from Regina's house out to the shack. They cooked outside and the backyard was trashed. It was clear Donna had no intention of leaving with her pit bull during our shoot. We knew this meant none of our dogs could be on set. It was also clear that Donna would change her mind if we gave her money, so we pooled the cash we had among us, and gave it to her so we could start our day.

I mention this incident, because there were many factors that came into play by taking a non-traditional approach to this film, working with non-actors, and prioritizing naturalism and authenticity. It meant that the kids we were working with, similar to the characters in the script, didn't have parents who could take off work to come to set. We were providing Kiowa with housing, Jenny with transportation, and emotional support to both of them. The people that lived at the locations where we were shooting were hard-up. After our interaction with Donna that day, Regina had health complications with her pregnancy and went into the hospital where she remained for the next week. Leaving set one night we found her 80-year old mother walking home, alone and disoriented. In other words, the fabric of where we were shooting, and who we were shooting with, inherently affected the fabric of our film set. We continued to experience obstacles in the making of our film based on the obstacles that people were facing in their every day lives. This kept our filmmaking problems in perspective. It also taught me an important lesson for projects like this in the future—*always allow more time.*

The two most challenging scenes to shoot at the house were the opening, when Leila discovers the dead skunk, and the make-out scene with Marco. The opening was difficult because the dogs didn't do what we'd planned. I asked Amy Bench to do additional cinematography on the EX-1 because I thought it would be easier to cover the dogs with two cameras instead of one. Our amazing production design team ordered a skunk hide on-line and then stuffed it with dog treats. Axel was supposed to run from behind the shack (now inhabited by Donna) with the skunk in his mouth. Tara had been working with him on this trick, but when it came time for him to perform he was too intimidated by the crew and distracted by all the trash Donna had left in the yard. Not only would he not carry the skunk in his mouth, he wouldn't even run to Jenny when she called him. I feel like I'm being hard on the guy, but the simple fact is, he's not a trained movie dog--he was afraid of the boom mic! *Bobbi Colorado, I did not heed your warning and it is coming back to haunt me.* Luckily we had a body double for Axel--a dog named Nike. Nike would sniff the skunk, but wasn't trained to come when called. This meant that the entire opening, as we had choreographed it, had to be scraped. We were trying to piece an alternative together as we were shooting, but it was a clunky process and I still think the opening is one of the weaker spots in the film.

The make out scene between Kiowa and Jenny proved to be hard, as was expected. Kiowa had experience with girls, but Jenny hadn't ever made out with a boy. She was upfront about this during callbacks, and we talked frankly about the scene in our

rehearsals with Kiowa, and with Jenny's mom. I trusted Jenny's decision that she could handle it. In the end, she came focused, prepared, and psyched up. It was Kiowa who seemed to have the harder time. On top of the fact that they had to kiss each other, take after take, they were physically uncomfortable. Regina has no AC in her home, and it was insanely hot. We bought individual spray fans to keep them cool in between takes, but it was really unpleasant, and much worse for them since they were making out on a couch all day. In one part of the scene Bubba is supposed to interrupt their make out. The kids had dog treats, and stuffed toys hidden behind them, and would start to kiss, waiting for the dog to enter so they could go into their lines, but Axel would just stand there watching, disinterested. It took a lot of takes, and naturally, the kids got frustrated.

Our savior was humor, and we used a lot of it. From crying out "leave no room for Jesus," to an inside joke about chicken wings, we tried to keep the atmosphere light without losing focus completely. It was hard to get through, and while it seemed like their performances were on point for the first half of the scene, they were having trouble committing to the second half when Marco prematurely ejaculates. It's a hard scene for youth to pull off, and I sensed that they were going as far as they could go that day. It felt irresponsible and unethical to push them farther. We recorded an alternative ending to the scene that I had discussed with Stuart in case the premature ejaculation didn't work. Instead, Leila's dog Bubba gets excited and pees on Marco's shoes, and this breaks up their make out session and angers Marco. This meant bringing the dogs back on set, but it seemed like the best option at the time.

Re-Casting: A “Crisitunity”

Between the time we shot the river scene in May, and when we resumed shooting in June, the actor playing Daryl, along with all of our extras, dropped off the project for various reasons. We knew this might be an issue. Since none of them had lead roles it was risky to expect them to stay committed, and they didn't. This meant that we had to recast all of them, and re-shoot part of the river scene with the new cast that would also appear in the dog fight scene we had yet to shoot. I was starting to lose my marbles by this point. For days leading up to the June shoot, I had been scouting for a new batch of tough guys. I had even met a group at Bull Creek who seemed perfect, but they were flakey. They said they were interested, but it was unclear if they would actually show up when we needed them. I was in a frenzy, driving around looking for tattooed men between 18 and 25. I called Stuart during this time, freaking out, and he pointed out that perhaps this was a “crisitunity,” (quoting *The Simpsons*.) It was true. I had been really unhappy with our footage of the first round of extras. They didn't come off as tough. I thought this would pose a big problem if these were the same guys that were supposed to be amateur dog fighters later in the film. We forged ahead, we cast Sam Stinson, a local actor as Daryl, and the guys I had met at Bull Creek actually showed up the day of shooting. With the last minute help of Amanda Gotera who held a final audition at UT the day before our reshoot, we pulled together a great group of extras who I felt looked the part, and made a lot of wonderful creative choices that added to the film.

Day 7: Returning to the River

We were intimidated to return to the river for our re-shoot, after our last experience, but we only did a half-day, and it went really smoothly. We didn't bring Tara's dogs, but rather had one of the extras bring his friend's pit bulls, and they were very chill. There weren't any major emergencies or mishaps and it allowed me the peace of mind to focus on directing! Nathan brought a change of clothes, should he get wet. Sam Stinson, our new Daryl, was really fun to work with. We experimented with each take and I encouraged the cast to improvise. We were all really excited by the footage we got. At the end of it we couldn't believe we had an actual shoot day without any major problems. But we were wrong—we found out after we finished that one of our cast member's car had been broken into. They stole her wallet and social security card. She had to drive back to Houston with a smashed window. I knew it was too good to be true!

Day 8-9: The Dogfight

Two days before we were scheduled to shoot the dogfight scene, Michelle, the woman whose backyard we were going to use decided to back out. She no longer felt comfortable with letting us shoot in her backyard while she was at work. We didn't understand what had changed. Evan and Sarah drove to Manor to try and meet with her face to face. They are two of the sweetest, most convincing people I know, and I was pretty sure that if they found her, they could warm her up to the idea again. This was true. The only caveat being, she wanted more money (it should be becoming clear why this

film went over budget).

We showed up at Michelle's house in Manor. She was already at work so we began to set up in the backyard. We heard barking coming from inside her house. Michelle had told us that she would take her dog to her mom's house for the day, but she had left him inside. This freaked Tara out, but we decided to continue. Michelle's dog was, after all, in a house, and we were outside the house.

Tara told us we had only two takes to try and get a master shot of Leila rounding the corner to find Marco with the two pit bulls together. She didn't want Patrón to get overly excited and pass out. Tara has been Patrón's trainer for several years and we trusted her to assess his physical capacity. For safety reasons, Tara kept the dogs far enough apart that Nathan and I strategized about how to shoot this sequence in a frenetic way that would make it seem scarier than it actually was. This ruled out getting a long shot of the scene. Since we knew we only got two takes we had our classmate Deepak Chetty shoot a 2nd camera, capturing close ups of the dogs, while Nathan followed Leila and Marco through the action. Because of the nature of the shot, I couldn't watch what was happening in a monitor, but I trusted Nathan's eye.

During our first take Michelle's dog lunged through a broken glass window at our crew. I didn't see this, but Monique and Tara did. The dog didn't make it through, but we couldn't do another take with him still inside now that it was clear that he could

potentially break out and harm one of our dogs or humans. We knew there was someone inside with the dog, because we could hear them moving around, but when we tried to speak to them through the window they wouldn't answer. We texted Michelle at work but she didn't respond. Cara, our production designer, found a piece of plywood and boarded up the window. We tried knocking on the door, but still no answer. Evan or Sarah had the idea of slipping a note through the door, asking the person to lock up the dog. This worked. The person, turned out to be Michelle's child. Michelle had told her not to open the door for anyone. With the dog inside locked up we went for our second take.

We were working in 104-degree sun all day, without any shade. We had a PA going back and forth between the gas station to restock on water. Everyone was moving as fast as they could, given the heat. It was grueling, and in retrospect we should have found a spot with more shade to shoot the scene. The layout was great, but the harsh sunlight was difficult to work in and also created lighting issues. We were all COVERED in chigger bites. We kept plugging along, but it was a slow day and the heat began to affect Jenny and Kiowa's performance. Axel could only do two takes at a time before he needed to cool off in Tara's SUV. Sam, who played Daryl, brought amazing energy to set, encouraging the other actors and crew when they looked hot and tired. But it was a very difficult day and challenging scene to shoot.

The last day went much better. The temperature was the same, but perhaps we had

all adjusted. My classmate and good friend Déjà Bernhardt, who had been catering the set all week, brought an amazing batch of roasted chicken. We were able to focus on Kiowa and Jenny's close ups, her bike ride to the dogfight, and the climatic pee moment. We stayed on schedule, and ended the shoot on a positive note.

I think several factors made *SKUNK* a difficult thesis film to shoot. This is not to say there weren't enjoyable moments. But there were so many challenges in working with the dogs alone, that for the majority of the shoot I was less focused on directing and more focused on logistical problem solving. And the irony is the film is shot in such a casual, naturalistic manner, no one would know from watching it how challenging it was to make. But it was a tremendous learning experience. One lesson, among many, is that when working with non-actors, and shooting in an environment that is difficult to control, you cannot schedule your shoot like a typical movie set. You need to be flexible, and find a realistic balance. This is a lesson I will take into my future projects. At the end of it all I was extremely proud of our cast and crew. We all fought hard for this movie and I'm proud of what we did.

POST-PRODUCTION

I took six weeks off from *SKUNK* to recuperate from the shoot, move out of my apartment, and catch up on other work. I began synching footage the third week of August and had a rough assembly cut by mid-September. I was feeling confident that the river scene would cut together, and I was pretty sure the dogfight scene would be okay. What concerned me most was the make out scene. The make out felt anti-climactic and unfinished. I showed the cut to Andrew Shea and he had the same response. He didn't think the alternate ending we shot was working and we started discussing the possibility of re-shooting the second half of the scene as I had written it in the script. Andrew believed that if I strengthened the make-out scene, the third act would work. His advice and encouragement was really helpful to me during this time.

The Editing Process

My goal was to edit what I had as tightly as possible so I could figure out exactly what was needed to make the story work. At this point, however, I began to hit an emotional wall. This has happened to me in the past when I edit my own work. I become so discouraged by what isn't working that I get completely demoralized and can't make any headway. I really didn't want to put myself through the emotional low again. The healthy choice would be for me to find an editor to work with for the rest of the cut. I had already pieced it together pretty well in broad strokes, so it conveyed the pacing, tone,

and foundation of the piece. But I needed someone who would work with me to bring it all together. This was the best choice I've made during my time in graduate school.

I met Josh Melrod through a mutual friend. He lives in Vermont and was looking for a piece to edit so he could gain experience in fiction editing. Josh was enthusiastic about the assembly cut, and we set up a time to talk over the phone. Even though I didn't have much to go on, as far as looking at his prior work, I knew from speaking with him that he understood the kind of piece I was trying to make. I liked his insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the cut, and thought he had good suggestions for how to make it better. He was an attentive listener, and clear communicator. He wasn't interested in starting from scratch, but rather building on what I'd already cut and making it stronger. I loaded all the footage on a hard drive and sent it to Vermont.

Working with Josh turned out to be a highlight of making my thesis film. My anxiety disappeared and I could focus on directing again. I still wrestled with all the same questions I would have if I were continuing to cut the piece myself, but Josh brought new ideas to the mix, and was an excellent sounding board. He was invested in telling a good story, and dedicated a tremendous amount of time to the project. Sometimes he agreed with me, other times he didn't, but he was always sensitive to my vision and in most cases we ended up on the same page. It was like finding the story all over again, and instead of feeling tormented by the editing phase, it was exciting and fun. The experience

made me certain, that I will never go back to editing my own work. I'm too hard on myself for it to be healthy, and it's too much fun collaborating with someone as good as Josh.

Josh and I spoke every other day for four weeks via email and phone, and made tremendous use of my Vimeo Plus account. We both agreed that re-shooting the end of the make out scene was essential. We then created a wish list of other shots it would be good to get if there was time during our re-shoot.

Re-Shoot

It was difficult to nail down a day Kiowa and Jenny were both free. School had started so we knew we would have to shoot on a Saturday or Sunday and we had limited access to the equipment. The only day that would work for everyone was Sunday, November 3rd. This left very little time to finish the edit, since my mix was scheduled to begin November 20th. Monique and I went by Regina's to ask if we could shoot in her home another day. Her three kids, who had been living with her sister out-of-state, had moved back home, and since our shoot they had been taking care of a pit bull called "No Name." Donna was still living in the back shack. We didn't plan on working with any dogs for pick ups or shooting anything in the backyard so this didn't pose a problem. Regina agreed and things seemed to be coming together.

A week before our re-shoot we realized the production design that was used in the make out scene had accidentally been donated to Good Will. Bich had since moved to Los Angeles, and Cara was busy with other work. Luckily we were able to find a production designer named Samantha Kuh to create replacements. I stopped by Regina's to double check if she had the same furniture. "As a matter of fact," she said, "we got a new couch." My heart sank. I asked her where the old one was and she said it was out in the back. I walked behind the shed and there was the white couch we used for the make out scene. It had been outside for a couple weeks and had been rained on twice. I drove home, borrowed my brother's truck, went back to Regina's and loaded up the couch. I figured that if we couldn't find a replacement, I would resurrect the make-out couch. I scrubbed it for a week with every cleaning solution imaginable.

At 6am the day of our re-shoot we lost our location. Regina went back into the hospital the night before and told Donna not to let us in. She was worried about her children and No Name. We assured Donna that it was okay for the kids and dog to be there. But Donna said no. Our entire crew stood waiting by the U-haul full of equipment. We asked Donna if there was anything we could do. She cracked open a beer and called Regina at the hospital and put her on speakerphone. It was one of the more surreal moments of the shoot. We eventually worked it out--the kids would put No Name in the back room and hang out in the back with Donna while we were shooting in the living

room, and we would double the stipend. Once it was settled, Monique and I said “c’est la Skunk,” and carried on with the day.

I was worried that Jenny and Kiowa would not want to do the make out scene again, but they were both mature about it. Since the last time I had seen them, they each seemed to have gone through significant changes. It’s amazing how much teenagers can transform in 3 months. Jenny had gotten a boyfriend, turned 15, and had a completely different energy. She was self-possessed and confident. Kiowa had turned 18, was cast in his school play, and was inspired to take more risks in his acting. This turned out to be my favorite day of directing the film. There were no dogs, no distractions, and I was completely focused on their performances and in touch with my own instincts. The youth were more relaxed, and there was a different dynamic between them. They seemed to be enjoying themselves. They both fully committed and gave their best performances of the shoot.

The footage we got during the pick-ups transformed my least favorite scene into my favorite scene of the film. Josh and I finished another cut, sent it out for feedback, and locked picture November 18th. My classmate and fellow filmmaker Nathan Efstation scored the film, I had a three-day audio mix with Eric Friend, and Dan Stuyck did the final color grade. The film was complete.

FINAL THOUGHTS

My thesis film is one of many films I hope to make. I wanted to create something personal, drawing on my background combining filmmaking and youth work, and taking greater risks as a director. I don't see *SKUNK* as a “culminating film” in my graduate experience so much as a “cultivating film”—an opportunity to further define my style of filmmaking. It's too soon to have much perspective on the final piece, but what I learned through the process of making the film is immeasurable. I'm proud of what we accomplished, and grateful to my cast, crew, and thesis committee for their dedication throughout this formative experience.

SCENE 1

INT. LEILA'S HOME - EARLY MORNING

LEILA, 15 year old and rough around the edges, wakes up to howling outside her window. Dogs growl and whimper. Leila pulls on a hoodie and rushes out of her room.

She passes the bedroom of her mom, JANIS. Her door is open a crack.

JANIS

(O.S.)

I'll pay you a hundred dollars if
you shut them up.

Leila pushes through the back door.

SCENE 2

EXT. BACK YARD - EARLY MORNING

A pack of dogs surround Leila, excitedly. Their whines carry through the barren landscape. Leila tries to hush them.

LEILA

Shhhh. What's wrong? Shhhhh.
Where's Bubba?

BUBBA, a PIT BULL bounds out from behind a bush and runs towards Leila whimpering. He has blood all over his face. Something dangles from his mouth. Leila covers her nose with her arm to block the stench.

LEILA (CONT'D)

Shit.

She walks further into the backyard, following a trail of parts. The other dogs continue to bark frantically. Bubba has decimated a SKUNK.

Janis comes out the back door. She's slung a worn pink robe over her nightie, she looks a mess.

JANIS

What the hell!

She covers her nose.

JANIS (CONT'D)

God damn that fuckin' dog!

LEILA
Well if you let me keep em' inside

JANIS
I let you keep them, look what happens!

Bubba whines. Leila tries to calm him down.

LEILA
Shhh. Bubba.

JANIS
Take care of it Leila. I don't want to smell skunk tonight.

Janis slams the screen door behind her.

LEILA
(yelling)
Can I use the truck?

No answer.

LEILA (CONT'D)
Can I use the truck?

JANIS
(through the door)
If it starts.

A neighbor comes out his back door, and immediately covers his nose. He swears in Spanish. Leila puts her hands up. He walks back in slamming the door. The dogs swarm around her.

TITLE CARD: SKUNK

SCENE 3

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - LATE MORNING

A truck rattles slowly down the road. Leila carefully maneuvers each bump, keeping an eye on her dogs through the rear view mirror. They stand huddled in the back, swaying on all fours. The dust clouds around them.

SCENE 4

EXT. WOODS/FIELD NEAR RIVER - LATE MORNING

The dogs run ahead, crashing through a field of birds looking for food. The birds erupt into the sky, scattering. Leila tags behind them.

SCENE 5

EXT. RIVER - LATE MORNING

Leila stands in the water with her pant legs rolled up. Her dogs splash around.

She crouches at the river bank and pours baking soda on Bubba's back. Her shirt is pulled up over her nose, it falls down.

Across the river a group of young men crank music from a stereo and drink beer. A couple teenage girls sit on the bank above them, flirting. One wears a jeans skirt. Leila watches them out of the corner of her eye.

MARCO, 16 years old, is younger and scrawnier than the other boys. He tries his best to compensate. He stands shirtless and shows off his TATTOO to his cousin DARYL, 19. Daryl is holding the leash of Patrón, a PIT BULL. He smacks Marco's tattoo with his other hand.

MARCO

Let me get a beer.

Daryl ignores him.

Leila looks down. She dumps more baking soda and peroxide on Bubba's back and massages it in to his coat. He pants, and licks her.

Marco jumps in the river. When he comes up for air, someone throws a beer can at him. Daryl and his friends laugh from the bank.

MARCO (CONT'D)

Damn man.

GUY ON BANK

Learn how to catch.

Leila turn her head so she can watch Marco. He's standing now, waist deep making circles on top of the water with his hands. A beer flies into the shot hitting him in the back. There is laughter from the bank. This time he notices her. She looks away. Marco begins walking towards her.

They make eye contact. They're interrupted by Patrón who barks furiously in the direction of Leila and her dogs. Marco and Leila both look up towards the bank, where Daryl yells at the dog.

DARYL
Shut the hell up.

The girls notice Leila, say something unintelligible and begin giggling.

Leila looks down embarrassed. Patrón stops barking under Daryl's command.

Marco begins walking towards Leila, holding his beer. She sees him coming, picks up the soap and starts scrubbing Bubba intently.

Marco notices the blood on Bubba's jaw.

MARCO
Dang, he get in a fight?

LEILA
With a skunk.

MARCO
Smells like it. He rip it in half?

LEILA
Pretty much.

MARCO
What's his name?

LEILA
Bubba.

MARCO
Bubba, that's my boy right there.
Bubba. He like to fight?

LEILA
No. He just got sprayed.

Marco takes a sip of beer. Leila squirts more dish soap on Bubba, unsure of how to act. Marco continues to watch her as she soaps the blood stains on Bubba's face.

Leila takes a stick and throws it in the water.

Bubba runs after it, diving back in. Soap bubbles pool around him. Leila stands up, holding the soap still in her hand.

MARCO
That soap biodegradable?

LEILA
What?

MARCO
Is the soap biodegradable? Let me see.

He grabs it out of Leila's hand. She doesn't let go at first. He wrestles it away, flirtatiously. Leila, flustered by the attention looks at his arm tattoo. Marco begins reading the label.

MARCO (CONT'D)
Phosphate, Sodium-Coco Sulfate,
Ethanol--dig-ly...I don't know how
to say that.

Leila looks down, concealing a smile.

MARCO (CONT'D)
(teasing)
Damn! You're a polluter. You're
polluting these natural waters.

LEILA
Like your friend over there?

Marco turns to look. His friend is taking a leak into the water upstream. He turns back to Leila.

MARCO
Nah, that's natural.

LEILA
(shy smile)
Stupid.

MARCO
I'm Marco.

LEILA
I know who you are.

MARCO
Yeah?

LEILA
You're Daryl's cousin.

MARCO

I don't know who you are.

Leila blushes and angles her face away.

MARCO (CONT'D)

I'm just playin'. You're Leila
right? Leila? Don't you live on
Hutchins?

LEILA

Yeah.

MARCO

And you were like, raised by a pack
of wolves right? Those are your
brothers and sisters.

Marco moves his hand in the direction of the dogs still
tromping around in the water.

LEILA

Whatever.

MARCO

No that's cool. Good company.
Better than them, fuckin' posers.

He nods in the direction of his older friends. Marco takes
another swig of beer, feeling like a legit thug while in the
newfound company of Leila. He's ridiculous and oddly
charming.

MARCO (CONT'D)

We should kick it sometime.

Leila shrugs.

MARCO (CONT'D)

What are you doing later?

LEILA

I don't know.

MARCO

Can I come over?

LEILA

(hiding a smile)
I guess.

MARCO

Well damn, it's not a requirement.

Leila can't help but smile. Marco beams at her.

Marco gets up and turns to leave. He turns back as if he forgot something and puts his head really close to Leila's. He sniffs her hair.

MARCO (CONT'D)
You should wash you hair. You smell
like skunk.

Marco walks off, turns and shoots her a last smile.

Leila watches him go. Marco walk to his friends. They have lost interest. The girl in the skirt drapes herself over Daryl.

SCENE 6

INT. RURAL HOME-AFTERNOON

Steam collects on the bathroom window. Leila opens it.

She towels off her head. She's wearing an oversized t-shirt. She lifts a strand of hair and smells it.

SCENE 7

INT. JANIS' BEDROOM-AFTERNOON

Janis' pink robe hangs over the door. Leila flips on the light and slowly walks into her mom's room. She opens the rickety sliding door to the closet and surveys the rack. She begins to sift through the clothes tentatively and stops at a jeans skirt.

SCENE 8

EXT. LEILA'S BACKYARD-AFTERNOON

-Leila blow dries the hair of ALLIE, the long haired collie in the back yard. The blow dryer is attached to an extension cord, which she has pulled out the screen door.

-The dogs speed through the back yard in a blur chasing a tennis ball.

-A breeze rattles through the tree branches. Leila lies on her back, resting her head on Bubba's stomach. She is wearing the jeans skirt, her shirt is tucked in.

The other dogs are sprawled out in the sun. She looks up at the sky, and fiddles with Bubba's ear. An airplane flies overhead.

SCENE 9

INT. LEILA'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Leila pulls the curtain to one side of the window. Marco is parking his car.

Leila opens the door and he walks in. He's still wearing his swimming trunks.

MARCO
What's up?

LEILA
Nothing.

Marco looks around the place. She follows behind him.

MARCO
Got any beer?

LEILA
Think my mom might have some.

Leila goes over to the fridge.

MARCO
There they are!

Marco goes to the screen door where the dogs wait outside. He opens the door and they come running in.

LEILA
My mom doesn't let them inside.

MARCO
That's so mean.

Leila hands Marco a beer who turns as the dogs run past him and presses Leila against the wall with his body.

MARCO (CONT'D)
She won't know. Where's the skunk?

LEILA
I buried it.

MARCO
Dumb ass skunk.

LEILA
It was defending itself.

Marco touches Leila's face. She doesn't move. She lets him inspect her.

Marco starts kissing her. Leila, inexperienced, keeps her eyes open. Marco's are closed. She shuts her eyes and kisses him back.

MARCO
Ow, don't bite.

LEILA
Sorry.

SCENE 10

INT. LIVING ROOM-AFTERNOON

Marco leads her to the couch. He puts his beer down on the coffee table, lies on top of her and begins kissing her again. Bubba comes up and rests his head on Marco's back. Leila grins.

MARCO
You want to get in on this?

Bubba stares at them. Marco rubs Bubba's head.

MARCO (CONT'D)
You should let me fight this dog.

LEILA
(still flirting)
Yeah right.

MARCO
C'mon. Look at that jaw. That's a strong jaw right there.

LEILA
Are you serious?

MARCO
Yeah I go with Daryl sometimes.

LEILA
That's sick.

MARCO
Why?

LEILA
Don't touch my dog.

Leila pushes Marco off and sits up.

MARCO
Shhh. I was kidding.

Marco moves towards her again.

LEILA
Stop.

MARCO
Calm down, I was just messing with
you. You're hot when you're angry.

He brushes the hair of her face and kisses her. She calms
down. He kisses her again. She lets him.

MARCO (CONT'D)
But seriously I could make us hella
money on that dog.

Leila punches him playfully. He laughs.

MARCO (CONT'D)
You like to fight?

Marco takes his shirt off, tossing it on one of the dogs.

MARCO (CONT'D)
You see my tattoo?

Marco shows his arm. She nods.

Marco smiles proudly. He begins kissing her again.

LEILA
Wait.

MARCO
Lift up your skirt.

Leila shakes her head no.

MARCO (CONT'D)
C'mon.

Marco tries to pull up Leila's skirt but she holds it down,
still kissing him back. He tries again to no avail.

A low GROWL comes from Bubba.

MARCO (CONT'D)

Leila...

Marco presses against her excited, then stops suddenly. He sits up awkwardly.

Leila sits up too. Marco is looking down at his shorts.

Leila looks over and sees a wet spot. She smiles, nervously. Marco looks up, furious.

MARCO (CONT'D)

What?!

LEILA

Nothing.

MARCO

It's your fault, fuckin' tease.

LEILA

It's alright. I won't tell.

Marco gives her a piercing look.

MARCO

Who would you tell?

Leila is quiet.

Marco grabs a decorative pillow next to him on the couch to try and wipe his shorts off.

LEILA

Wait, I'll get you a towel.

Leila stands up. Marco shrugs as she walks away, still angry.

SCENE 11

INT. BATHROOM - AFTERNOON

Leila closes the door. She pulls a hand towel from the rack and turns on the faucet. She wets one end of the towel, and wrings it out.

Leila pats her hair back into place.

The sound of an engine comes from the front yard.

SCENE 12

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Leila enters the living room with the towel. The dogs are whining.

Marco isn't there. She turns around and looks at the backyard. It's empty. Leila rushes to the window and sees Marco driving off in his car, with Bubba IN THE FRONT.

LEILA

Marco!!

Marco drives down the road. They're gone.

SCENE 13

EXT. DRIVEWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

Leila tries to start the truck. It won't turn over. She tries again. It revs, then stalls out.

LEILA

Shit!

She tries one more time and it catches. (Or she gets out slams, the door and picks up a bike lying on it's side in the yard).

SCENE 14

EXT. ROADS - EARLY EVENING

INSERT DRIVING/BIKING HERE

Still undetermined whether Leila bikes or drives to the dog fight. If she bikes imagine the shots very close, hair whipping around, then one extreme long shot. If she drives also very close, she looks down streets, dirt alleys, etc.

SCENE 15

EXT. DARYL'S HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

Leila pulls up to a dumpy looking house.

The two girls from the river are sitting on the porch sipping drinks and smoking cigarettes.

Leila sees Marco's car parked around back with several others. She can hear ferocious barking. She walks quickly past the girls.

GIRL 1
(barely audible)
Can I help you?

Leila ignores them.

SCENE 16

EXT. DARYL'S BACKYARD - EARLY EVENING

Leila turns the corner and sees Daryl's pit bull, tethered to a pole, aggressively yanking against his chain trying to reach Bubba. The dog barks and growls. Marco holds Bubba by a makeshift leash. He holds him by the collar, trying to rev him up. Bubba resists, anxiously. A group of guys are crowded around, laughing.

MARCO
C'mon Bubba.

Leila rushes towards them.

LEILA
Marco!

Marco ignores her.

DARYL
Man, that dog wouldn't kill a cat.

OTHER TEEN
(looking at Leila)
Your girl is here.

Leila arrives at his side. Marco won't look at her.

LEILA
Give me my dog.

Marco doesn't respond. He taps Bubba in the face with the stick trying to excite him. Leila grabs Marco's shoulder.

LEILA (CONT'D)
Stop. Give me my fucking dog.

Marco turns his shoulder away from Leila. Bubba, excited to see Leila pulls on the leash but Marco pulls him back. Bubba yelps.

MARCO
(without looking at her)
Chill out.

Leila moves around Marco's side and grabs the leash herself, trying to yank it away but Marco doesn't let go. The other teens snicker. Bubba begins barking anxiously.

MARCO (CONT'D)
 Damn Leila, just one round.
 (Marco lowers his voice, almost
 trying to calm her down)
 We'll break them up!

LEILA
 Let go!

MARCO
 You let go!

Marco pulls Bubba again towards the other dog. Leila attacks. She grabs for the leash again, and this time sinks her teeth into Marco's arm that holds the rope and BITES down. Marco yells in pain.

He finally wrenches her off.

MARCO (CONT'D)
 What the fuck??!!

Daryl bursts out laughing. Marco is embarrassed.

MARCO (CONT'D)
 Crazy bitch. Probably gave me
 rabies!!

LEILA
 Give him to me!

DARYL
 (still smiling)
 Damn Marco, give her the dog. It's
 not like it can fight anyway.

Marco looks increasingly ashamed and angry -- he's losing control of the crowd.

MARCO
 Alright. Damn. I'll give you your
 dog... I'll give him back if you
 lift up your skirt.

There's a couple snickers. Marco stands a little straighter, trying to regain his lead. Leila looks at him stony eyed.

MARCO (CONT'D)
 Seriously, pull it up and you get
 him back. I promise.

FRIEND OF DARYL'S
 (laughing)
 Man, that's wrong.

Leila reaches for the rope again.

MARCO
 Nope.

He twists it away from her and motions to her skirt.

Leila looks at Bubba. Marco has him on a short leash. Bubba pulls against it, trying to reach her. The other pitbull continues to bark, spit flying.

Leila takes hold of her jeans skirt and LIFTS it up, showing her legs and underwear. She's not ashamed. She stands there looking Marco straight in the eye, furious.

Nervous laughter from the crowd. The girls from the front porch have come around to watch. Girl 1 shakes her head, angry.

Leila keeps her eyes fixed on Marco. Marco laughs and casually hands Leila Bubba's leash.

MARCO (CONT'D)
 Told y'all, her pussy smells like
 skunk.

GIRL 2
 God Marco.

Leila has the leash, but doesn't move. She's seeing red. Marco smirks, looking over his shoulder for his male friends approval. Leila takes two steps closer to him, close enough now to whisper in his ear. Marco looks back at her and his smirk fades. He looks at her questioningly. He can't read her expression.

His confusion turns to shock. Marco looks down, something TRICKLES on his shoe. Leila has PEED on him.

Marco jumps back.

MARCO
 Fuck! Nasty!!

The crowd erupts. "What'd she do?!" "Marco got peed on!!"
 Bubba starts barking at Marco.

Leila pulls her skirt back down and whirls around with Bubba. Daryl is pointing at Marco and laughing. Others are laughing too. Marco is humiliated.

MARCO (CONT'D)
You're a freak!!!

Leila quickly walks away with Bubba.

SCENE 17

EXT. RURAL HOME - TWILIGHT

A cluster of moths surround the porch light. Leila's other dogs jump around her as she approaches the house with Bubba.

SCENE 18

INT. RURAL HOME - TWILIGHT

Leila pushes open the door, letting the dogs in the house. Janis is asleep on the couch in her work uniform. The TV is on.

Leila takes a pair of scissors out of a drawer and shuts it.

Janis slowly wakes up. Leila sits on the floor with Bubba and uses the scissors to undo the knots in the rope around his neck.

JANIS
Damn Leila, why are the dogs in?

LEILA
I'm keeping them in. I'll do all the cleaning and put them in my room but I'm keeping them in.

Janis is startled by the tone of her voice, and her expression.

JANIS
What's wrong with you?

Leila finishes taking the rope off Bubba. He licks her face.

LEILA
Nothing.

Leila wraps her arms around Bubba. The reflection from the TV casts a blue light over the two.

THE END.

SKUNK Scene 1-10 Story Board DSLR

SCENE 1:



SCENE 2:



SCENE 3:



3A.



3B. Through window, dogs in back.



3C. Rear view mirror, CU

SCENE 4:



4A. ELS-Leila walking with Dogs

4B. Pan of Walking w/ reflection, closer



Starts soft...



Pans up to her feet

SCENE 5:



5A. Reflection Pan Up. She walks out in water, trying to get dogs to come.

5B. Close up Leila Reaction Shot On-the-line



Wider shot



5C.



5D. Tighter Clean POV...extras, all beats, marco jumping in & Hooch barking.



5F. OTS-MCU Marco comes into frame and jumps in water in background.





5G. MS Frontal.



5F. (continued) OTS he walks towards her.



5J. Clean shot of Marco walking towards L.



5K. Dirty Single Marco



5K. CU Dirty Single Marco (after Leila stands up).



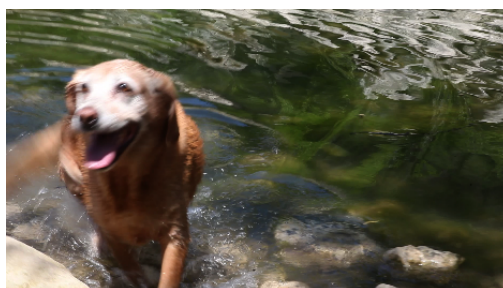
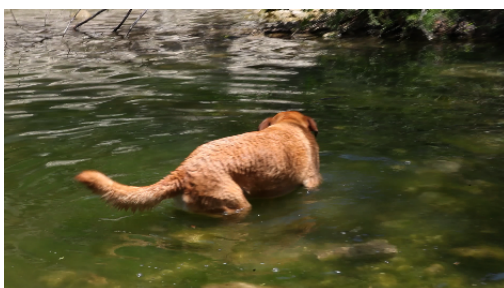
5L. Dirty single Leila. “What’s his name?”



5L. Continued Dirty single of Leila when she’s standing.



5T. Roaming from across river in CU.



5W.1 Dogs splash (assortment)

SCENE 6:

Leila towels her head

6A. CU blow dries her hair, smells it



6B. MWS towels hair



SCENE 7:



7E.POV of mom's room



SCENE 8:

-Leila feeds the dogs, tries to keep them off her skirt. 2-3 shots hand held, varied.



Scene 9-Marco comes over
9A.



9B. OTS, Marco arrives



9C.



She should pause for second before walking toward him, then tracks with her head as she walks to him.







9D. Reverse shot (start wider).

Note: focus on Marco until she turns at front door and then rack focus to her.







expose for outside, let them be dark

9F. CU of Leila, “my mom doesn’t let them in”/first kiss



10B. MS Frontal



10F. Dirty single of Leila



10G. Single of Marco, roaming, sometimes dirty

